

MSDL Board Meeting Minutes

March 14, 2023 at 7:00 pm
ZOOM meeting

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 PM by the president, Greg Cunningham

Board Members in attendance

Joe Bowden, Scott Caron, Josh Cohen, Greg Cunningham, Sue Hennessey, Lisa Honeyman, Jim Honeyman, Sheryl Kaczmarek, Tammie Ruda, Chris Sheldon and PJ Wexler

1. Prep for **Debate** states (Josh)

- **Friday night:** online. There will be a Zoom judge lounge. Greg will transfer the Zoom license to Josh for the weekend.
- **Saturday:** in person at A-B.
- **Sunday:** online in the evening. At most semifinals and finals, depending upon registration.
 - 5:00 pm: Novice finals in LD and PF
 - 7:00 pm: Varsity PF finals and, if necessary, Varsity LD
- Staffing looks good with Josh, Kaz, Janet, Tammie, PJ, Gabriel + NY gang
- Acton-Boxborough is prepared. Josh will work with Sue H. to do rooms etc.
- Flowers for seniors - We have about 25 left from last year. Greg will order about 100 more.
- Cupcakes - Sue H. will get the regular cupcakes. Tammie will order the gluten free cupcakes.
- Trophies are ordered. Greg will bring them to the tournament on Saturday afternoon.
- Awards will be in the cafeteria. A-B will be decorating. Greg asked about an overhead projector. They will test things out on Saturday when he arrives.
- Because the graduating seniors were online for a while, we'll spin the wheel to give out Amazon gift cards at final awards. Suggesting three \$25 cards at debate and three \$25 cards at speech states (for nostalgia's sake.)

2. Prep for **Speech/Congress** states (Joyce/Joe)

Sue will reach out to Amanda about Cupcakes. Greg will take care of the flowers.
Joyces has everything else handled
Joe asks for legislation earlier so that participants have adequate time to prepare

3. Elections (PJ)

- Greg will step down as president, but Amanda has expressed interest in the role
- Jim will run for treasurer - would love to talk to someone who might like to step into that role down the line
- Josh will run again for chair of debate
- Joyce will run for chair of speech
- Joe will run again for chair of congress
- Lisa will run for secretary/VP

A number of folks who have been on the board for a long time indicated that if there are younger/newer coaches who would like to hold a board position, they would be willing to step aside to let new folks step into leadership roles. We talked about how to get that message out to the membership. We talked about ways to assign at-large positions to specific roles where we could mentor newer coaches who were interested.

4. Equity proposal (Scott)

This year we had a number of complaints in speech.

Concerns

- The MSDL may not have wrapped up these situations completely. Things didn't always feel fully resolved.
- Issues that are brought to the Equity officer don't always feel like true equity issues
- What is the scope of our responsibility, especially when a student feels something is an equity issue but the Equity Officer sees it more as an issue of misunderstanding?
- Is there more training necessary for the person we put in the role of Equity Liaison?
- Is this really our problem to address?

Question: Is it our job to mediate conflict that is brought to our attention?

How do other competitive activities, like athletic programs, handle situations that arise? In some cases the larger league does get involved (MIAA): they can ban specific students or schools from attending/participating in games or as spectators.

Often in other leagues the adults handle the situations on behalf of their students.

This is in the MIAA handbook July 2021-June 2023, which doesn't immediately apply but might provide a starting point? : Any student in any sport who willfully, flagrantly, or maliciously attempts to injure an opponent shall be removed from the contest immediately and shall be ineligible in all sports for one year from the date of the incident. ("Fighting" does not apply to this section unless warranted in the judgment of the game official.)

The national trend in speech & debate is to have equity personnel at competitions to discern what is an equity issue and what is some other type of issue.

Students need to know what to do when they feel there is an equity issue. Going to the judge during the round is not what we want students to do. We want them to go to their coach and let the coach decide if the issue is something that should be pursued.

Chris wrote a draft equity statement and shared it with the committee, but it was not finalized.

What we have learned

We need a clear protocol

- A form should be completed and submitted
- That form goes to the Tournament director who decides if the issue is an equity issue or not
- If it is determined to be an equity issue, the TD hands it over to the Equity Officer, if not, the TD handles the situation.

- We need a clear statement of what our league considers an equity issue. "Community Standards." That statement should be in at least a rough draft form by the Annual Meeting.

CONTENT WARNINGS

We need a clearer statement about content warnings and our expectations around them.

Example: "A content warning should help the listener prepare themselves for what they are about to hear."

Last year the NCFL offered specific language at the start of some out-rounds in debate. Maybe we can get their language and use it as a model.

The purpose of a content warning is to allow folks to prepare for what's coming and, if they feel they need to step out, time to leave. This information needs to be provided at the start of the round, especially so judges can be replaced if they feel unable to judge the material.

Perhaps speech competitors can put that information on the board when they put their competitor number there so the information is shared before the round starts.

Content warnings are intended to give speakers, judges and debaters time to prepare their minds for potentially difficult content. It is the position of this tournament that all students should present content provide warnings prior to the start of the round if there is any chance difficult content might come up. Not doing so should not be construed as a reason to win or lose a debate and should not affect speaker points. Instead, content warnings should be offered in the interests of making speech and debate as comfortable a place as possible for all participants, given the complicated world in which we live.

For next year

- We need a clear “Community Standards” statement about what we value/expect.
- We need a clear process to tie up loose ends.
- We need a policy to handle what happens if there is a re-occurrence of behavior after a situation is resolved. In other words, how do we back up what we are saying?
- We need to consider content warnings and expectations around them/how we handle them and also how we prepare judges to deal with them

The NSDA and NFHS organizations have developed some materials that we may find useful as we work on the things we need to address.

Should we form a standing committee to constantly evaluate how these types of issues are addressed as they come up during the year. Scott should not be the only point person. More hands would be better to pursue this going forward.

Paying for an equity officer is expensive, more expensive than anything else we spend money on during a typical year. Is there a different way to spend MSDL money to get more people trained to deal with equity issues at tournaments other than paying an equity officer?

Are we better served by hiring someone from outside the activity and unaffiliated with anyone at the tournament?

Is hiring someone with certification important?

Is there a model we could use where we handle situations up to a certain point and if we feel we need help, we consult with a trained person who is not directly involved with the league.

Can we cooperate with another league to serve as each others' equity consultants?

Not having an Equity Officer on-site was not ideal during the few times situations arose. While she was helpful when contacted, it would have been better if she were physically present.

Possible Path Forward

Under the Existing Board:

- **Write an equity statement to make clear our expectations:
Present the statement at the Annual Meeting - and maybe vote on it at the Annual Meeting**

Under the New Board:

- **Create a committee before summer begins**
- **Provide training for the committee (and maybe more folks)**
- **Arrange for a trained back-up person to help us if an issue requires more than the committee can handle on its own**

At The Annual Meeting

We will also talk about what is a content warning and how would we like them handled?

5. Reimbursement proposal (Scott/Jim (and Lisa))

Proposal for Reimbursement of Enrichment Requests:

- Designate \$1500 annually for enrichment/development grants open to all coaches in the league. The year would be defined as Sept 1 - Sept 1, for ease of planning (as opposed to a calendar year).
 - Coaches apply for these grants by a deadline (or deadlines) to be established by the board or a sub-committee of the board.
 - The board or a sub-committee of the board read applications and grant full or partial payment up to the annual limit. If, for example, there were five applications totaling more than the X annual limit, partial allocation might be made to some or all of the applicants. The committee would decide how to allocate the funds. (Not all applicants would be guaranteed a grant or a partial grant.)
- * Depending on the annual limit the board establishes, a note on the application might identify how much funding any one grant request could receive so people don't have unrealistic expectations. For example, if we allocate \$1000 per year in grant money, then no one person or school could ask for more than \$500, or something like that.

- * Priority is given to applications which most benefit the league as a whole and/or to applications from coaches who have not previously or recently benefited from an MSDL grant. Recipients must be adult coaches of teams in good standing with the MSDL (current Participation Agreement & paid-up dues) who have at least one year of experience in working with their team.
- Examples might be registering for an Equity Training workshop or developing a new coaches training model for the league or attending a coach training workshop or attending a meeting of a related organization if representation at that meeting might benefit the MSDL.

Questions which spring to mind:

- How much money should be allocated annually to this purpose?
- What should the application deadline(s) be?
- What should the application ask for specifically?
- How will the grant application process be communicated to the league as a whole, so that newer, less experienced coaches are aware of (and therefore more likely to apply for) the opportunity?

Motion: Wexler

2nd: Bowden

The motion passed unanimously, with one abstention.

6. Annual Meeting Prep (Greg)

Date: April 29 at 11:00 am

Tentative location: Needham High School: Room 728

Live + Zoom option

- Equity conversation
- Content Warning discussion

Next Board Meeting: April 10, 2023 at 7:45 pm

Via Zoom

Motion to adjourn: Scott

2nd: Honeyman

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

--Lisa Honeyman

Clerk/Secretary